



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- TALENT MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 4, Issue 7

July 2014

Secretary Vilsack Signs Historic Memorandum of Understanding with National Hispanic Leadership Agenda

By Jacqueline Padron and Yahaira Lopez

Secretary Tom Vilsack recently signed the first Departmental Federal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA).

NHLA is a nonprofit and nonpartisan coalition including the 37 leading national Hispanic organizations in the country. NHLA brings together Hispanic leaders to establish policy priorities that address, and raise public awareness of, the major issues affecting the Hispanic community and the Nation as a whole.

USDA and its agencies and offices currently partner with a number of NHLA member organizations on a variety of issues that impact Hispanics. USDA works to provide full access to USDA programs and enhance Federal career opportunities for all groups, including the Hispanic community. This agreement establishes a partnership with NHLA and a framework to explore and address core issues for Hispanics.

Oscar Gonzales, Deputy Chief of Staff, led this historic effort on behalf of the Secretary. NHLA leaders thanked Secretary Vilsack for his leadership in signing the first Departmental Federal MOU and supporting NHLA's efforts to address diversity and workforce issues across all Federal Departments.

Through its partnership with NHLA, the Department continues to demonstrate its commitment to transforming USDA into a culture that exemplifies diversity, inclusiveness, and is focused on high performance.



Secretary Vilsack and NHLA Chair Hector E. Sanchez (3rd from the right) sign the MOU as representatives from USDA and NHLA observe the commemorative signing.

USDA to Observe National Breastfeeding Month

By Debra S. Arnold

USDA is committed to fostering an environment that is conducive to building a breastfeeding-friendly community. World Breastfeeding Week is an opportunity for us to recognize and support the efforts of those who encourage communities to support breastfeeding throughout the year.



"Breastfeeding: A Winning Goal for Life" is the 2014 theme for World Breastfeeding Week. USDA will join the effort August 1-7, 2014, by increasing awareness and demonstrating support for expectant and breastfeeding mothers. Learn how the promotion of breastfeeding aligns with the 'Millennium Development Goals' set by governments around the world and the United Nations to fight poverty and promote healthy and sustainable development by 2015 by visiting [World Breastfeeding Week](#).

In 2012, USDA released the Nursing Mothers Support Handbook to assist expectant and breastfeeding mothers. To obtain a copy of the handbook, email us at wellness@dm.usda.gov, or download it from our [Nursing Mothers](#) program page on USDA Connect. In addition to World Breastfeeding Week, the US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health recognizes the entire month of August as National Breastfeeding Month. The benefits of breastfeeding are numerous for the mother, the infant and the economy. Read about the many benefits at [NIH Health Topics](#). For more information on our Nursing Mothers Program, and other worklife and wellness programs, please visit our Web site at [Work/Life and Wellness](#). USDA continues to be recognized as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace in 2014!



USDA Agencies Team Up for Pride in Oregon

By Erin McDuff

Employees from the U.S. Forest Service, Rural Development, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Farm Service Agency worked together to celebrate Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month in June to recognize the contributions of LGBT employees and customers. Lissa Biehn with FSA (left) and Romona Mitchell with RD (right) were on hand to discuss USDA's dedication to civil rights in employment and program delivery at the Pride Northwest Festival in Portland on June 14, 2014.

President Strengthens Work/Life Programs

Our President understands the importance of workplace flexibilities for the working family of today. During the first Live White House Summit on Working Families held in June, the President shared the following:

"Every day, I hear from parents all across the country. They are doing everything right — they are working hard, they are living responsibly, they are taking care of their children, they're participating in their community — and these letters can be heartbreaking, because at the end of the day it doesn't feel like they're getting ahead. And all too often, it feels like they're slipping behind. And a lot of the time, they end up blaming themselves thinking, if I just work a little harder — if I plan a little better, if I sleep a little bit less, if I stretch every dollar a little bit farther — maybe I can do it. And that thought may have crossed the minds of some of the folks here from time to time.

"Part of the purpose of this summit is to make clear you're not alone. Because here's the thing: These problems are not typically the result of poor planning or too little diligence on the parts of moms or dads, and they cannot just be fixed by working harder or being an even better parent. All too often, they are the results of outdated policies and old ways of thinking. Family leave, childcare, workplace flexibility, a decent wage — these are not frills, they are basic needs. They shouldn't be bonuses. They should be part of our bottom line as a society. That's what we're striving for."

-President Barack Obama

Read the [Presidential Memorandum, Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Programs](#) or view the President's full [remarks](#), and consider joining USDA in supporting workplace flexibilities and the working family.

USDA Employees Get Fit in 2014!

By Debra Arnold

Being fit means more than just exercise! It includes proper nutrition, mental health, and reducing health risks such as smoking, obesity, and unhealthy addictions. Regular Workplace Wellness Programs are linked to greater productivity, less absenteeism, and a reduction of long-term health care costs. USDA observed June as National Employee Wellness Month with a month-long initiative of events and activities across the country aimed at encouraging employees to get fit and stay fit in 2014. Here are a few highlights:

Washington D.C., The Office of Operations - was joined by multiple Agencies to kick off the Annual Presidential Walk with the first of six weekly 2 ½ mile walks. Participants enjoyed the kickoff walk by delighting in the company of fellow USDA walkers and meeting new people. "Sharing this event with interesting, highly motivated and positive co-workers made it seem less like exercise." (Wenda Bold, BSN, RN)

Pictured right: USDA Running and Walking Club (RWC) members (from L-R): Dr. Walter Faggett (USDA Medical Officer), Wenda Bold, Edith Manasala, Tatjana Fernández, Louise Fox, and Bruce Reynolds.



Washington D.C., Agricultural Marketing Service - was joined by multiple Agencies in developing and hosting the **AMS Annual Health Fair**. The DC Fire Department provided glucose screenings and demonstrations on how to use a fire extinguisher. Numerous screening stations were available for blood pressure, diabetes, glaucoma, spinal, and stress indicators. Approximately 200 people attended the Fair taking a step toward healthier living. The event was a huge success and is still the rave of the hallways. (Crystal Sutherlin, Event Coordinator)

Nebraska, Food Safety Inspection Service - kicks off the month with a Health & Wellness presentation from Tim Smith, of *The Tea Smith*, about the healthy benefits of drinking tea. It is sun tea time of year after all. (Peter Duryea, Health and Wellness Program)

Vermont, Natural Resources Conservation Service - Employees have received a steady flow of great information and resources including helpful articles, tips, and group activities scheduled over the next few months. (Shari Cohen, State Wellness Ambassador)

Iowa, Rural Development - Established a three week competition for staff to start or continue a healthy lifestyle with the emphasis on consistency, not athletic performance. Seven teams were started with 42 employees participating. The goal was for 150 minutes of physical activity each week. All seven teams reached over 85% of the goal with four teams achieving a 100% completion. All teams will be recognized at their State Meeting. (Douglas Grindberg, State Wellness Ambassador)

To share stories about your personal fitness journey with others, please visit our Community of Practice on USDA Connect at [Work/Life and Wellness](#), or email us at wellness@dm.usda.gov.

FAS Encourages Employees to Bike to Work



By Katrina Reid

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) employee and bike enthusiast Betsy Baysinger (left) instructed employees in how to repair and replace a bicycle tire and tube as part of National Bike Month. Betsy recommends changing the tube and tire at same time, that you look for holes and harmful particles such as glass in the tire and the tube, and when filling with air, the bicycle tire should be firm, not yielding to touch. FAS Administrator Phil Karsting hosted an early morning kick-off to celebrate Bike Month, which included a healthy breakfast served by the FAS Junior Professional Advisory Committee (JPAC). To further encourage employees, Administrator Karsting announced that FAS will now cover the \$50 sign-up fee for the Capital Bikeshare program and will pay up to \$20 per monthly, reimbursed annually to employee participants, for the cost of health and fitness center memberships for FAS employees.

Feds Feed Families Campaign Now Underway

By John Glover

The Federal-wide 2014 Feds Feed Families (FFF) food drive is underway. The food drive campaign runs through August 27, 2014. The FFF campaign has been in existence since 2009, with total donations of more than 24.1 million pounds. In 2013, Federal employees donated 8.9 million pounds of food, with USDA employees alone contributing more than 4.3 million pounds. Those contributions show the commitment and compassion of USDA employees to help those with the greatest needs. Although USDA does not have an official donation goal for 2014, Secretary Vilsack has challenged USDA agencies to “beat your previous best.”



According to statistics, one in six Americans are affected by food insecurity. These individuals are often our neighbors, family members, friends, and even Federal co-workers. Thanks to Feds Feed Families, you and I can make a difference in the lives of those who need our help the most.

How can you help? USDA employees can participate by donating unexpired nonperishable food items, conducting fundraisers, and participating in sponsored gleaning events. Employees are prohibited from making monetary donations for FFF. (Federal statutes restrict monetary contributions only to the Combined Federal Campaign.) Employees are permitted to pool their money to make joint food purchases. Find more information at the [“USDA Feds Feed Families \(Official\)”](#) community on USDA Connect. How will you contribute to the Feds Feed Families campaign? Get involved and let’s beat USDA’s previous best!



Pictured: Secretary Tom Vilsack (above left) announces the kick-off of USDA’s Feds Feed Families campaign. (Below left) USDA Feds Feed Families Chair John Glover (in green shirt on the left), Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network staff, employees of Department of Homeland Security, and other volunteers at Eagle Tree Farm, Colonial Beach, Virginia, gleaning squash for Feds Feed Families. (Right) Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory Parham (in blue shirt on the right) and other USDA employees and volunteers participate in a FFF gleaning event at the Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network warehouse in Cheltenham, MD.

UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCE

Women’s Equality Day, Tuesday, August 26, 2014

The observance is from 10:00am to 2:00pm (EDT) on the Whitten Patio, Washington, DC
Employees receive one hour of diversity training for attending USDA Special Observances.

USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum Student Diversity Program Winners: Where Are They Now?

By Brenda Chapin

USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum Student Diversity Program began in 2007, when 10 students were selected to attend USDA's annual Agricultural Outlook Forum in Arlington, Virginia. With support from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and CHS, Inc., Farm Credit, and USDA's Economic Research Service, Agricultural Research Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service, 145 students have participated. We contacted previous winners to find out where they are now.

- **2007 Winner: Rena Ruffin, USDA Agricultural Economist in Montana**
Ms. Ruffin is working with the NRCS as an Agricultural Economist in Montana where she works on a team concerned with improving water quality, health of livestock, and soil health.
- **2008 Winner: Meredith Esguerra, USDA Rural Development in Washington, DC**
Ms. Esguerra is a procurement analyst with RD. Following graduation she began full-time work with RD while she completed her Master's degree in Business Administration.
- **2009 Winner: Amber Seibert, Agriculture Teacher in Minnesota**
Ms. Seibert is working as a high school agriculture instructor and FFA advisor in Minnesota where she teaches classes, including Animal Science, Conservation, Forestry, and Landscape Management.
- **2010 Winner: Miquel Macias Gonzalez, Graduate Student in California**
Mr. Gonzalez is a graduate student doing research with genetic mapping of resistance genes. The Forum gave him a completely new experience because he met with the heads of companies and USDA leaders.
- **2011 Winner: Charlotte Brewster, USDA Soil Conservationist in Maryland**
Mrs. Charlotte Brewster is an NRCS soil conservationist. Upon graduation she obtained a Pathway's internship and received a Master of Science degree in Food and Agriculture Sciences.
- **2012 Winner: Richard Stonebreaker, USDA Research Biologist in Maryland**
Mr. Stonebreaker is a research biologist with ARS where he works on manure pathogen survival study, examining how long pathogens can survive in manure and "field to table" projects.
- **2013 Winner: Candice Harvey, USDA Program Analyst in Washington, DC**
Ms. Harvey went from being a Diversity Program winner in 2013 to a Forum planner and speaker all within one year's time. As a GIPSA employee, she joined the USDA Forum planning committee and used her experiences to help organize a successful 2014 session.

To read more about students winners, please go to: http://www.usda.gov/oce/forum/diversity/diversity_program.htm.

ARS Scientist Mentors Middle-School STEM Scholar

By Debra Owens-Coleman

Ariana Cantu Martinez, a middle-school student in Houston, Texas, is a 2014 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) scholar. She will attend the *National Youth Leadership Forum (NYLF): Explore STEM* at Loyola University in Chicago this summer. Her mother, Dora Cantu (pictured right) is senior research coordinator at USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Children's Nutrition Research Center in Houston where she works closely with Deborah Thompson, an ARS research nutritionist (pictured left) who is proud to serve as one of Ariana's mentors. The NYLF is for high achieving students who have excelled academically. Scholars participate in a variety of interactive simulations, hands-on workshops, and educational site visits to help them develop key leadership skills and other essential skills.



"Ariana has 'starred' in several video clips we created to enhance data collection, such as how to attach an activity monitor and how to take accurate height and weight measurements at home," said Dr. Thompson. "She has always been a pleasure to work with – eager, interested, and highly motivated. I'm very excited she was selected to be a STEM scholar."

Click on this [link](#) to see some of the USDA-ARS video clips in which Ariana has starred.

Forest Service Wins National Telework Award

By Lisa Mason

The U.S. Forest Service has received the 2014 Commuter Connections Employer Recognition Award from the Metropolitan Council of Governments. The Awards Selection Committee chose the Washington Office as a premiere model of excellence for its employee telework program. Nearly fifty percent of employees in the Washington area have filed core agreements to telework. Prior to the Sidney Yates Building renovation project in 2013, Forest Service Washington Office employees were reporting to two facilities in DC and two office buildings in Rosslyn, Va. In an effort to reduce leased space, promote program integration, provide cost savings, and become more sustainable, a complete renovation of the historic Yates Building occurred. Because of the consolidation, Forest Service employees are now embracing telework options with much more frequency. To accommodate more employees in the Yates Building, they have nearly doubled the number of employees who have core telework hours for the past year.



(From L-R): Tah Yang, Melissa Dyniec, Lenise Lago, and Andria Weeks accept the national award on behalf of the Forest Service.

ARS Outreach to Native American Students in Arizona

By Debra Owens-Coleman

In June, the Native American Institute's Web BeePop program began at the University of Arizona, a Hispanic Serving Institution. The Web BeePop program is a collaboration between the USDA-Agricultural Research Service's (ARS') Carl Hayden Bee Research Center in Tucson, Arizona, the University of Arizona, and the Tucson High Magnet School. The Institute teaches Native American high school students mathematics, biology, and writing skills. The program is part of the curriculum for the biology and mathematics sections. Students visited the Carl Hayden Bee Lab for hands-on instruction in beekeeping and honey production, and they learned about the Bee Lab's research program.



NRCS-Minnesota Celebrates Asian-Pacific Islander Month

By Julie MacSwain

Recently, the Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office held a potluck event for employees to celebrate Asian-Pacific Islander Month. Minnesota NRCS Cartographer John Xiong brought a fruit carving to the potluck. His carving was made out of a watermelon and cantaloupe which included roses, the NRCS raindrop logo, and the word "Sharing".

Since folks were sharing their food with the fellow co-workers Xiong felt it would be a perfect way to share the love he and his wife have for fruit carvings. Fruit carvings such as this originated from the country of Thailand. From start to finish the carving took three hours to create.

Some employees potluck thought the carving was so beautiful that they wondered if they should even eat it!



You can contact MyUSDA by emailing MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov, and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA Connections](#).



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MyUSDA Staff

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Roberta Jeanquart—*Deputy Editorial Director*

Perry Stevens—*Editor-in-Chief*

Curtis Wiley, Alyn Kiel, Lynne Short, Karlease Kelly, Debra Arnold—*Lead Editors*

Edwin Cierpial, Jr.—*Editor*

Key Contributors:

Zina Sutch, Monshi Ramdass, MaryJo Thompson, Alison Levy, Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman, Marisol Rodriguez, Tina Hoellerer, Tatjana Fernandez, Jacob Faibisch, Susan Siemietkowski, Jacqueline Padron, Fred Cheng, Ali Muhammad, Ashwin Karkera, Mika Cross, Yahaira Lopez, Lisa Mason, Max Finberg, Julie MacSwain, Brenda Chapin, Katrina Reid, John Glover, and Erin McDuff

If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov

Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The deadline for August submissions is Thursday, August 7, 2014.

Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing some aspect of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person account (describing a personal work-related experience relating to CT progress), or a "brief" (just a few sentences describing a successful Cultural Transformation event, group, initiative, or activity...or some other relevant worklife issue with an accompanying photo. Send photos as separate attachments and make sure they are high quality. **The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it. Maximum length of articles is 250 words.**

Email submissions or further inquiries to MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.